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Leah M. Dunn, "Library Connections: A Non-Linear Approach to Planning, Marketing and Creating the Positive User Experience" (2010). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314842>

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LIBRARY CONNECTIONS: A NON-LINEAR APPROACH TO PLANNING, MARKETING AND CREATING THE POSITIVE USER EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

What do recycling, 'The Sound of Music', Siena, Italy, fair trade coffee, and a college library have in common? If you've ever watched the BBC TV series "Connections" by James Burke and enjoyed his interdisciplinary approach to how events interconnect, you will enjoy this discussion of the interconnectedness of library services and how one library is using it as a basis to fill the "perception gap" between what librarians think our patrons want and need and what they actually do. This presentation will "connect the dots" for one library's strategy for planning, marketing and creating the positive user experience and ask the audience to share ways to do the same. The presenter will share how each of the elements above influenced the Guilford College Library's own strategy for change.

"Connections" was subtitled, "The Alternative View of Change." The objective of session is to apply this non-linear approach to how libraries are adapting to changing user needs and expectations and how such an approach can help librarians think "outside the box" for how to best meet library needs. Participants will also discuss the "perception gap" and examine ways to identify and respond.

Audience participants will be asked to share ways in which they have effectively created or maximized the positive user experience through their own planning, marketing or innovative activities. How does user experience shape services? How do you define a positive user experience and gather data about that experience? Participants will be encouraged to discuss all areas of library services including collections, instruction, facilities design, renovation, and library services.

Attendees will benefit from the shared experiences of other attendees and identify tools, strategies, and methods to plan, market, and create services that resonate with users.

BACKGROUND

If you've ever watched the BBC TV series "Connections" by James Burke and enjoyed his interdisciplinary approach to how events interconnect, you may ask yourself how you could use the same approach to planning for change in your own library. This is exactly what our library did when faced with collected data that said we needed to make some changes. We knew these changes were needed in many areas, so we chose to take a broad view of all of them to begin.

A helpful tool in the beginning of our assessment process was quantifiable data. One great joy in working close to several institutions with library school programs are the myriad opportunities to tap in to the knowledge-seeking both embodied and required of such programs. In spring 2010, a group of University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) library school students conducted a needs assessment survey of both library employees and students for their library administration and management class. Their survey found a 'perception gap' between employees' perception of library services and customers' perception for the same. According to their findings, 46% of library

employees were “extremely satisfied” with the access they provided to materials and resources, while students response to the same question only found a satisfaction rate of 15%.¹ On the other hand, 87% of customers responded with either “agree” or “strongly agree” to the survey statement “the library is important to you.” The survey analysis concluded that the library is something students need and want, but that the library is not fully meeting their needs.

THE HEGE LIBRARY EXPERIENCE--AGING FACILITY

Hege Library was built in 1989 and has had no significant refurbishment or renovation since that time. Furniture is worn. There are not enough public computers. It has only two small group study rooms. There is no mention of plans to address library facility needs in the previous or current strategic plans for the college. Approximately 22% of survey respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of quiet space for study in the library. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is the result of increased collaborative assignments and no space to complete them. Therefore both quiet study and group study take place in the same area.

CONFLICTING STATISTICS

Our use statistics are also another source of data for planning that was examined. Unfortunately, until this spring the library did not have the ability to accurately take door counts for building use. But general observation shows that it is a heavily used facility. Yes, while we don't have any “targets” for number of desired circulation or reference transactions, circulation numbers seem low. For 2009-2010, total circulation statistics were at 20,472, and the general reference desk had 3,612 transactions. One use statistic that has grown at an enormous rate is interlibrary loan. The number of filled transactions went from 335 in 2009 to 1365 in 2010. While we are pleased at the high use of the service and with the improved satisfaction with it, it is disconcerting that customers are not finding what they need from the library's extensive, particularly electronic collection.

THE APPROACH

With this data to guide us, we examined the multitude of library service areas outlined below.

Planning:

One of the planning activities currently underway is an LSTA planning grant administered by the State Library of NC. Through this grant, the library conducted a Learning Behaviors Survey with the aid of a library space-planning consultant. This survey will tell us what types of learning activities students and faculty value and where on campus they are able to engage in those learning activities.

Marketing: In marketing, the library looked at who has interest in using our library, and we found that it is not just the student population. Guilford College has a large number of community members, with a large retirement population just across the street made

¹ Baker, Laura, Andrew Fair, Heather Higginbottom, Trae Middlebrooks III and Jacquelyn White. “A Needs Assessment Study of The Customers and Employees of The Hege Library, Guilford College, North Carolina.” Final Paper prepared for ILS 650, UNCG, May 2010.

up of many Guilford alumni or people active in the Quaker community. Through informally polling the Friends of the Library members, we found that these community members are very interested in participating in our events. So one additional community activity we embarked upon this year and marketed heavily to the retirement community was special events surrounding Greensboro's One City, One Book, *The Soloist*. We had a film screening and a book discussion that brought together participants from both the student and community population.

We also took what had been a negative perception — that the library is not open enough hours—and turned it into a marketing opportunity by offering a student late night coffee break (fair trade coffee, of course, which is an important issue for our students) on the first night of exams. This was also the first night of our new, extended 24-hour access to the library during the exam period. We don't have funding to stay open all night year-round, but we can do it for about a week each semester during the exam period.

Creating:

We have also begun discussing and brainstorming with students about what gets them really excited about their college experience—activities such as study abroad, hanging out with friends, social causes they are involved in. Our goal was to find a way to tie in library resources in a way that supports those activities. As a result of paying attention to what is important to students, we developed and marketed a 'popular materials section' in the library that included popular books and magazines, as well as travel books and popular DVDs. We combined our efforts for creating a good popular DVD collection by partnering with a local bookseller to exchange gift books we did not want for DVDs that they received. We marketed this to students as "recycling" materials and capitalized on current sustainability efforts being promoted by the college. We put out boards where students could recommend titles. One surprise we found was that students want classic films like "The Sound of Music." And not such a big surprise was that they want to check out travel books, especially for study abroad destinations, such as Siena, Italy.

Tools, Strategies, Methods:

The primary tool that we are developing to guide us is our Strategic Plan. As a result of a 'staff planning' day in January 2010, library staff members identified the top things to include in the library strategic plan. At the top of this list is to "Improve Library Discovery Tools." We created this as our primary goal in January 2010 before the needs assessment was conducted.

Another goal is to create a "service culture". In write-in responses to both the UNCG needs-assessment and to the learning behaviors survey, student desk public service attitude was perceived negatively. This is a more challenging issue.

And a third goal is to create a marketing and outreach program. Currently it is truly non-linear. We have identified some goals and have implemented a number—student newsletters, slides of library "ads," 24-hours and student appreciation during exams.

Discussion:

What would be on the top of your list in your strategic plan if you were creating it today?

Is service culture a challenge for your library? What steps have you taken to improve it or in other public service areas?

What marketing and outreach tools have you found useful?

How are you addressing aging facilities? Collections? Instruction? What is your library doing to create the positive user experience?